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ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL



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# ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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24 Duff Street,  
ARNCLIFFE. 2205.

June 1982.

Dear Friend and Member,

The June Meeting will be held as follows:-

Date: Friday Evening, June 18th, 1982, at 8.00 p.m.

Place: Council Chamber, Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale.

Business: General.

Syllabus Item: "Sydney's Lamp Lighting Entrepreneur. John White and the Blazing Star". Mr. Alan E.J. Andrews, Member of the R.A.H.S., Chief Engineer (Construction) of the Metropolitan Water, Sewerage and Drainage Board, Sydney, will be Guest Speaker on this occasion, and we will learn of "John", Sydney town's lamp supplier, lamplighter extraordinary. This subject will be of interest to all, and entertaining too.

Supper Roster: Mrs. Havilah, Captain, and Mrs. Turton and Miss Moffitt.

Ladies please bring a plate.

Mr. R. Lee,  
President.  
Phone 570 1244.

Mrs. B. Perkins,  
Publicity Officer.  
Phone 587 9164.

Mrs. E. Eardley,  
Sec. & Bulletin Ed.  
Phone 59 8078.

Mrs. E. Wright,  
Treasurer.  
Phone 599 4884.

Miss D. Row,  
Social Secretary.  
Phone 50 9300.

Mr. A. Ellis,  
Research Officer.  
Phone 587 1159.

"Wisdom is the difference between pulling your weight  
and throwing it around."

..... Friendship Book 1971.

Many of our Members have been and still are ill. We are sorry to hear this, and hope they will be well again soon.

#### SPECIAL NOTICE.

The St. George Historical Society is pleased to announce that the following books, written and illustrated by the late Gifford H. Eardley for the Society, have been reprinted and are now available. No.8 Book was compiled by Mrs. Bronwyn Perkins.

- No. 1 "The Wollli Creek Valley"
- No. 2 "Kogarah to Sans Souci Tramway"
- No. 3 "Saywells Tramway -- Rockdale to Lady Robinson's Beach"
- No. 4 "Arncliffe to Bexley Tramway"
- No. 5 "Our Heritage in Stone"
- No. 6 "All Stations to Como"
- No. 7 "Tempe and the Black Creek Valley"
- No. 8 "Early Churches of the St. George District:"
- No. 9 "Early Settlers of the St. George District" -- should be available later this year.

All books now available at \$1.25 per copy - plus current rate of postage.

For your copy of the above books, please contact one of the following:-

Mrs. E. Wright - Phone 599 4884, Miss B. Otton - Phone 59 4259 (after 8 p.m.)  
Mrs. E. Eardley - Secretary - Phone 59 8078, Mr. A. Ellis - Phone 587 1159.

Also available is a very interesting book - "Tempe - East Hills Railway", by B.J. Madden. Published by Hurstville Historical Society. Price \$1.80 per copy. Postage extra. Phone 599 4884, 59 8078.

The Research Project. "Early Settlers of the St. George District" -- undertaken by some of our members, is progressing. Much information has been gathered. However, there is still a long way to go. Help from interested members would be greatly appreciated. Can you help towards "Book No. 9" in our series of books on history? We would like to thank those members who have contributed. Your efforts are greatly appreciated.

Visitors are always welcome at our meetings.

Social News.

The following outings have been arranged by our Social Secretary for your pleasure; we do hope Miss Row will have your support.

A Coach Tour to Dapto, where you will visit "Horsley", a lovely old home.

Date: Saturday, June 26th, 1982.

Meeting Place: Western side of Rockdale Station.

Time: 8.30 A.M. SHARP

Cost: \$6.00 per person.

A Coach Tour to Gosford to visit "Henry Kendall Cottage" amongst other points of interest.

Date: Saturday, August 14th, 1982.

Meeting Place: Western side of Rockdale Station.

Time: 8.30 A.M. SHARP.

Cost: \$6.00 per person.

A Day at the Blue Mountains, to see the Rhododendrons, which should be at their best at this time of the year.

Date: Saturday, November 13th, 1982.

Meeting Place: Western side of Rockdale Station.

Time: 8.30 A.M. SHARP.

Cost: \$6.00 per person.

Also, a Proposed 3-day Midweek Tour of Orange - Bathurst and surrounding districts.  
Suggested date: Wed. 13th, Thurs. 14th & Frid. 15th April, 1983.  
Autumn is beautiful in these areas. Details later.

## SURGEONS OF THE FIRST FLEET -

- Dr Noel Dan.

AMA Gazette, May 15, 1980. No. 245. p. 16-17.

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The Managing Editor - AMA Gazette -

Newsmagazine of the Australian

Medical Association.

*When those who were to be our first white settlers set out for Terra Australis in tiny ships, the task of getting them to the southland alive (at least) and in health (if possible) rested with a handful of surgeons about whom only sketchy details were recorded. Sydney neurosurgeon Dr Noel Dan pieced together the limited data and presented it to a symposium on the 'History of Medicine & Health in Australia' held in Sydney earlier this year. Dr Dan's presentation is published here for your interest & enjoyment.*

The First Fleet bore nine medical men. Between the naval and the civil complement, it had about one surgeon to every 150 persons. This must surely be the best-doctored foundation of a nation ever. In addition, there are two names that ought to be added. Irving and Lowes.

Irving, a convict transported for larceny, was transferred to act as surgeon's mate on the *Lady Penryn* after initially being embarked on *Scarborough*. He acted as surgeon's mate from March 20 to April 27, 1787 when Atree returned from sick leave. His employment in this situation suggests that he had some surgical experience before his conviction.

On the fleet's arrival in Sydney he was immediately employed as a hospital assistant. Subsequently on February 28, 1790 he was the first man emancipated by Governor Arthur Phillip in recognition of 'his unremitting good conduct and meritorious behaviour'. Lt. Ralph Clark described Irving as 'the best surgeon amongst them' and Judge Advocate David Collins reported 'he was bred a surgeon'.

Lowes is mentioned as a participant in an exploratory & a punitive party, but was not otherwise noteworthy.

In the interests of medicine, Governor Arthur Phillip was a fortunate choice for our fledgling colony. Many letters dated at the time of the period of preparation of the fleet clearly demonstrate his concern for public health. Surgeon Worgan's letters to Phillip asking for medical supplies, including Peruvian bark, were promptly passed on to the Admiralty. Unfortunately, the authorities do not appear to have met the requests - so reminiscent of modern hospital experience.

Phillip further complained about deficits in the supplies, the lack of anti-scorbutic supplies and the imposition of ill and decrepit convicts on the infant settlement. He wished especially to exclude those suffering from venereal disease.

Medicines, instruments and supplies to the value of pounds 1,429 were brought by the fleet. Unfortunately, many of the supplies were defective and useless. Phillip's voyage clearly relates that he stopped at Teneriffe specifically for fresh rations and that he was familiar with Cook's successful measures against scurvy. In addition fresh fruit was taken aboard at Rio de Janiero and at Capetown and diarists report that it was immediately followed by an improvement in the health of those on board ship, both convicts, marines and crew.

The health on the voyage was singularly good despite complaints that magistrates in England disregarded selection criteria. Only one of 212 marines and 24 of 775 convicts died on the voyage out. In addition, there were at least six deaths of seamen through accident none of which could reasonably have been modified by medical intervention.

This record of the First Fleet is in singular contrast to that of the second.

An interesting contrast to Phillip's concern for his settlement and his apparent humanity which seems emphasised by the small number of lashes given to malfeasants on the voyage out, was his proposed plan for dealing with murderers. These were to be taken to New Zealand for consumption by cannibals, this deliverately gruesome death being meant to be a deterrent to others. The other crime that he specifically rated worthy of capital punishment was sodomy. But as time passed men were hanged for a variety of other reasons, including the stealing of food.

Governor Arthur Phillip was not a well man, judging by Surgeon White's recorded details of several incidents when he was able to recognise the Governor's distress. At His Majesty's birthday celebrations on June 4, White noted the Governor to be in pain but putting up a brave front. Incidentally, during those celebrations, Phillip named the area The County of Cumberland. It was expected that he would call the town Albion but the settlement was not far enough advanced for the foundation stone to be laid. The name of Sydney Cove eventually was applied to the whole township and so it is the name "Sydney" we use today.

We are fortunate that three of the surgeons, White, Worgan, and Bowes-Smyth, left journals and books which have been published. But although the medical men should have been among the more literate of those on the voyage, their journals tell us relatively little about themselves and those conclusions we are able to reach must be made mostly by deduction.

It is possible, however, to piece together some sort of profile on the medical men as follows:

*Principal Surgeon John White* - was appointed to his position in 1786 at about 30 years of age, after serving eight years in the Navy. His salary was 10 shillings a day (pounds 182.0.0 per annum) and his assistants were paid half that rate. He had received his diploma from The Company of Surgeons on August 2, 1781.

He was an ambitious man who quarrelled with many people and had clashes or disparaging relationships from the time of his arrival at Portsmouth to join the fleet. The records of these brushes continue in his criticism of the 'crossing the line' festivities, seem self-indulgent in his description of his achievements in the hospita- in Rio de Janiero and result in his fighting a duel with Surgeon Balmain in August, 1788. His claim to have discovered the medicinal value of native plants was contested by another Surgeon, Denis Considen, who claimed this fame for himself.

Thomas Watling, the convict artist who was assigned to White on his arrival in 1792, was disillusioned with White who took the credit for Watling's sketches. Watling described White as "a very sordid, mercenary person".

One of White's further distinctions was that he became the first explorer of native produce of Australia when he sent a quart of Eucalyptus oil to England. His land grant of 100 acres is now part of the inner Sydney suburb of Leichhardt. Subsequently, he was given a further 30 acres fronting White Bay. He returned to England on leave in 1794 and never returned to the Colony.

*George Boucher Worgan* - entered the Navy at 18 and was gasetted a naval surgeon in 1780. He was the son of a doctor of music and brought a piano to Sydney with him. On his departure this was left behind with Elizabeth MacArthur whom he was teaching to play. He appears to have a personable fellow who took part in various expeditions and by inference was active in the social life of the colony.

Lt. Bradley's journal describes how he shot a crow in front of some natives shortly after the fleet's arrival. When the bird, which was winged, recovered sufficiently to fly off, the amazed natives concluded that whites could both take and give life.

Along with the surgeons, Arndell, Balmain, Bowes-Smith, Irving and White he is recorded as giving evidence before the courts of the settlement - perhaps a forerunner of the frequent court appearances demanded today of some of our specialists. After the *Sirius* was wrecked in 1790, he spent a year on Norfolk Island before returning to England in 1791 in the *Waaksamheyd*.

*Arthur Bowes-Smyth* - was a surgeon's son born in 1750, the seventh of ten children. He practised at Tollehurst D'Arcy, his birthplace, from 1778 to 1783. He was appointed to the *Lady Penryhn* in 1787 to care for the ship's company. This was the only transport with a medical officer for the convicts to be provided by the ship's owners. During the Portsmouth fitting-out period he reports setting a fractured ankle, seemingly of the Pott's type.

The fleet sailed on May 13, 1788 and on June 2 Bowes-Smyth was formally requested by White in the Governor's name to care for the convicts, as Altree was unable to do so.

Bowes-Smyth's journal records some medical incidents on board during the voyage. Strong disapproval of the quality and morality of the female convicts is apparent throughout the journal but he appears to have cared for them conscientiously. At Botany Bay, in the initial meetings with the natives, sensing they were perplexed by the dress of the whites, he exposed himself to reassure them of his sex. Also at Botany Bay he was probably the first white man to see an emu which he described as a "a bird of a new genus, as large and as high as an ostrich". He died in 1790 shortly after his return to England.

*Thomas Jamison* - was appointed to the *Sirius* in 1786 at the age of 41. He was dispatched with the first group of settlers to Norfolk Island in March 1788 when Phillip sent a group there to relieve the shortage of provisions in Sydney. After the wreck of the *Sirius*, Phillip appointed him assistant surgeon to the colony. He was due pounds 91.5.0 per annum but due to confusion with another Jamison he received only pounds 40 and was treated very shabbily in the process.

Following his service at Norfolk Island, he was promoted to Surgeon General to the colony in 1801. In 1804, he introduced smallpox vaccination to the colony shortly after its introduction in England and in October of the same year published Australia's first medical paper in the *Sydney Gazette* entitled 'General Observations on the Smallpox'. This publication was also a public health measure as he was attempting to win over the population to vaccination.

In 1808, as principal surgeon to the colony, he examined and certified William Redfern an emancipated convict and a naval surgeon prior to his conviction, as the first medical diplomate in Australia. He was also a magistrate until dismissed by Bligh. He signed the deposition to Johnston asking him to depose Bligh and during the rebellion was named Naval Officer in Sydney. In 1809 he went to England with MacArthur to help Johnston defend himself.

He appears to have been terrified about the consequences of his actions during the rebellion but does not appear to have suffered because of it. He obtained land in the upper Nepean River District around Penrith near Sydney, and one of the grand houses of the area, Regentville, was built by his son.

Jamison court-martialled two assistant surgeons, Mileham and Savage in 1805 for neglecting women in labour in separate incidents. Because of confusion about the articles of war and colonial regulations the charges were set aside by the War Office.



*Denis Consideen* - was White's first assistant surgeon. He was a naturalist and a conscientious surgeon. He studied native plants for their medicinal values and was in dispute with White about who was the discoverer of the anti-scorbutic effects of the native sarsaparilla, and the dysentery-ameliorating effects of wild myrtle, of the red and yellow gum and of the native sweet tea. There was some contemporary support for his claiming that achievement as his own but the matter was not resolved.

In February, 1794, after several applications he returned to England in ill-health. Subsequently, he studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh and graduated MD in 1804. He spent further time in military service as well as in practice in Ireland and died in 1815.

*William Balmain* - was born in 1762 and entered the Navy as surgeon's mate in 1780. In 1786 he was commissioned as an assistant surgeon to the colony. It was he who extracted a native spear from Governor Phillip's neck on September 7, 1790. He duelled with White in 1788 and threatened to duel with MacArthur. He was transferred to Norfolk Island in October 1791, returning in August, 1795 to act in place of White who had then returned to England. He was subsequently appointed principal surgeon in 1796, but not without a further squabble with White over pay matters.

Balmain was highly critical of his predecessor and made persistent requests for more medical supplies and manpower and for stores which were desperately short. He also attempted to improve medical conditions on convict ships by making useful representations, but they were not adopted. After appointment as a magistrate he was granted 975 acres of land at the Field of Mars.

He was also appointed Naval Officer in Sydney for a time. Perhaps as a result of his magisterial experiences, on his return to England in 1801, he made some sensible suggestions for improving the court system although without immediate results. He died in 1803 in England.

*Thomas Arndell* - was born in 1753, a nephew of the 6th Baron Arundell. His wife had died and he had changed his name before departing England. On arrival he was put in charge of the hospital at Parramatta but resigned this post in 1792 to undertake farming, although he still undertook some medical duties.

All our founding surgeons seem to have had some interest in agriculture but Arndell farmed at the expense of his medical duties.

However, Governor John Hunter granted him more land, appointed him a magistrate and made him apothecary at Parramatta Hospital. He subsequently sat with Marsden on an inquiry into small farming at Parramatta and attempted to improve his wool flock by introducing a Spanish breed. Presumably he was less successful than the redoubtable MacArthur. At his death in 1821 he owned 750 acres but was of only moderate means and his widow had to seek assistance from the British



Government for her support in 1830.

*John Turnpenny Altree* - is renowned principally for his ill-health on the voyage to Australia. Subsequently he was transferred to Norfolk Island as assistant to the assistant surgeon and a superintendent of convicts in clearing and cultivating the ground there. On March 8, 1791, he signed receipt for the sum of pounds 10.0.0 on account of those services over some three years from March 1788 to February 1791. On March 14, 1791, Governor Phillip reported that Altree returned to England in the transport *Waaksamheyd*. Overall, Altree appears to have been an insignificant figure in the development of the colony.

*James Callam* - is even more ghostly. Apart from some correspondence in which he gives little in the way of useful information regarding either himself or the colony, there is almost no record of him.

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The value of the part played by medical men in the growth and advancement of the young Australian colony and their contribution to the world's body of scientific knowledge is summed up by Dr Michael E Hoare, Research Fellow of the Adolph Basser Library of the Australian Academy of Science (1966-74).

He wrote: (1) "Because of the nature of European scientific enquiry and training in the second half of the eighteenth century surgeons and physicians inevitably took or were called upon to take a prominent role in the acquiring and dissemination of scientific knowledge of a new country or region. To the first or 'Banksian Era' of scientific enquiry in Australasia (1770-1820), doctors, many of them inspired directly by the physician-naturalist tradition of taxonomic science so ably promulgated by Carl Linnaeus in Uppsala, Sweden, since the 1740's were at the forefront of the fact-gathering and scientific arrangements of materials from the 'fifth continent', particularly in botany and zoology. On Cook's voyages, for example, there sailed Johann Reinhold & George Foster & William Anderson who gained eminence as naturalists, & on later Pacific voyages came Archibald Menzies (with Vancouver) & that most eminent British systematic botanist - albeit an Edinburgh medical student *manque* - of the early nineteenth century, Robert Brown, who came out with Matthew Flinders in the *Investigator* to lay the basis of Australian scientific botany. With the establishment of settlements, medical men, both resident and naval, like John White & George Bass, made enduring contributions to Australian scientific history".

White's Journal of a voyage to New South Wales with 75 plates of non descript animals, birds, lizards, serpents, curious cones of trees & other natural products was published in London in 1790.

It contains finely detailed illustrations of Australian native animals and plant life.

A copy of the publication is included in the library of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians housed in their headquarters at 145 Macquarie Street, Sydney.

- (1) I an introduction to the catalogue of Doctors and Australian Science, an exhibition of medical books & writing displayed in the RACP library as part of the joint meeting of the RACP, the RACS & RCPS (C) held in Sydney in February (1980).
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